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Welcome by Way of a Proem

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WELCOME BY WAY OF A PROEM

Fifty years ago, the world turned on their television sets and opened *Life* magazine to watch Rome bloom into new foliage, in a new springtime born out of the ecstatic vision of a smiling pope. The *dynamis* set in motion by John XXIII, and nurtured by the collaboration of thousands from around the world found its strength in two forces working in tension: *aggiornamento*, the updating of an institution to better meet with the times and persons it encounters, and *ressourcement*, a returning to the sources to find focus and refinement of a faith tradition. In many ways, such dynamics parallel successful theological scholarship, something very much alive, here, at Saint John's.

By the time of Vatican II, Saint John's was considered to be one of the premiere centers in the world for the liturgical reform movement. This was consistent with Saint John's striving to be a worthy home for creative theological and liturgical exploration. Founded in 1857, Saint John's became the first Roman Catholic theologate to offer graduate degrees to women in 1958. In the spirit of such a living faith, alive in the world where life is lived, we at *Obsculta* are excited to share with you bright examples of *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement*.

This year's selections represent the many interests and pursuits of the student body at Saint John's, including an example of original liturgical musical composition. Taken together, the body of work this year stands as a credible

response to Saint Benedict's invitation—*Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistra, et inclina aurem cordis tui* ("Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instruction, and attend to them with the ear of your heart").¹ The new format allows more work to be exhibited, and allows *Obsculta* to share exciting but difficult explorations which often require a lengthier presentation.

Grounded in tradition and the sources, Saint John's invites sincere colloquy with the greater world. For as Avery Dulles wrote in the midst of 1968, "The modern believer cannot and should not be asked to accept the world view of ancient or medieval Christians. He should be encouraged to think as a man of his own day."² Fifteen years later, Elizabeth Johnson freed the modern believer from androcentrism, when she wrote: "Theology will have come of age when the particularity that is highlighted is not Jesus' historical sex but the scandal of his option for the poor and marginalized, including women."³ Some twenty years later still, on the eve of the canonization of John XXIII, Pope Francis is inviting us all to go out, empowered by such a scandal, and to bring the good news to a waiting world.

In order to ascend to Francis' exhortation, one must not only discover one's own voice but also discover the voices of others, sometimes voices that have not been privileged, sometimes still in formation. Often these voices are "strident and uncivil—in a word, other," says David Tracy. "But only by beginning to listen to those others may we also begin to hear the otherness within our own discourse and within ourselves. What we might then begin to hear, above our own chatter, are possibilities we have never dared to dream."⁴ *Obsculta* is a *student* journal, and as such, it is work-

in-progress, a snapshot of the diversity of shared exploration, a record of trials, possibly errors, but—more importantly—possible truths. The pieces chosen reflect the wonderful synergy of the classroom discussions and the late-night, down-the-hall, over-a-beer, light-bulb moments that occur when a diverse group of individuals come together in community over a common love of the Word.

John XXIII was a pope who transcended his institution, and became an inspirational example to all good persons, far beyond the Catholic Church or the Christian world. When he died between the first and the second sessions of Vatican II, Soviet Navy warships, at anchor in Genoa harbor, lowered their flags to half-mast.⁵

Pope Francis seems to be affecting a similar appreciation. Bishop Dennis Madden, from the Archdiocese of Baltimore, came to Saint John's this spring to celebrate the anniversary of *Lumen gentium*, and whilst here, he shared an anecdote from his recent trip to Iran to visit with some of the Grand Ayatollahs. As the delegation of American Catholic bishops was leaving, one of these learned men thanked Bishop Madden for “*our* Pope,” for a pope for whom the ayatollahs and the Shi’ite faithful could value as a holy man.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of the Impossible.

Lastly, it is in the spirit of Francis, in appreciation of an understanding of Vatican II’s “People of God” and Jesus’ own Parable of the Workers of the Vineyard (Mt 20:1-16), that we would like to give *equal* honor to all persons who gave to the production of this issue, regardless of how long or how many hours. For in doing so, we begin to put into practice Jesus’ message that “the last will be first and the first will

be last.”

Enjoy the creativity and the explorations that follow.

Much *shalom*.

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and Karen McClain Kiefer

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Notes:

¹*Rule of Saint Benedict 1980*, trans. Timothy Fry, O.S.B.
(Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981), Prol. 1.

²Avery Dulles, S.J., “Dogma as an Ecumenical Problem,”
Theological Studies 29, no. 3 (1968): 406.

³Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,”
in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist
Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, 115-138 (San
Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 131.

⁴David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion,
Hope* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 79.

⁵Stephen Schloesser, S.J., “Against Forgetting: Memory,
History, Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 283.